

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY BEHAVIOR IN THE LEISURE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The leisure industry encompasses a large variety of segments and has a large addressability to the general audience. Talking about sports, entertainment, crafts, hobbies, etc. the leisure services are widely spread and more and more appealing to the masses, influencing the character of leisure in a positive way.

The play is an essential part of any leisure activity and knowing the motivation for play determines multiple opportunities to enhance the leisure services world wide. Further more not only the play theories are important, but also the play concepts and its involvement in the leisure activities.

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1. Introduction

The play has represented over the years one of the most important parts in growing up. As a component of education playing has taught children to develop different abilities, capacities, understand and apply strategies, team work, the notion of success and failure, and much more. As an adult, the meaning of play hasn't changed and furthermore has determined the play to become a major part in every day life.

The major component of play represents the benefits obtained, the satisfaction, the entertainment, and therefore the leisure.

Studying the play theories and play implication in leisure behavior can influence the leisure services searched and chosen and more important the development of leisure industry.

2. The play theories in leisure industry

Playing is referring to the actions that are voluntary, intrinsic and generate a level of pleasure and entertainment. Contrary to the fact that the play is usually considered to be a non-serious activity, it offers a perspective on social relations, level of communication, abilities to concentrate, types of personalities, types of

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strategies used, relaxation and therapeutically aspects and so on. In playing activities has been seen the source of culture, the pylon of education, the key to enhancing the creativity, all under one important aspect: the leisure.

The specialists concluded a number of theories regarding the play and it's significant. More specifically, the leisure literature presents the principals motivation for play and therefore it underlines the main criteria in selecting and targeting the segment of leisure consumers.

The general motivations and play theories are been seen as [Leitner, 2004]: *play as a surplus energy, play as recreation, play as instinct, play as learning, play as catharsis, play as the expression of self, play as relaxation, play as compensation or generalization, play as an escape from social reality, play as optimal arousal.*

Play as an energy surplus

This theory describes the playing patterns as a necessity to release the surplus energy, after a period of sedentary. Also it is obvious that people play regardless of the level of energy they poses, for instance been tired. This is clearly, the motive to enjoy the play in order to eliminate the extra energy that accumulates over the day and it explains a number of leisure activities used by both children and grownups.

Play as recreation

The recreation theory is presented in contrary to the energy surplus suggesting that after a long period of sedentary, the motivation for play doesn't constitute the consume of extra energy, but the need to restore the energy lost in leisure activities such as sports. This idea targets a different type of activities encompassed by the leisure sector.

Play as instinct

The earliest theory regarding play situates it as an inherent characteristic hereditary based only on the instinct as motivation of play behavior

Play as learning

The learning theory brings out the idea of play as the result of the desire to learn, usually associated with children, for example learning social skills from practicing sports. Regarding the children, we can say that the desire to learn is most likely on a subconscious level, rather than just the pleasure of the play. Nevertheless the concept of learning by playing is attributed to all adult by practicing leisure activities like lecturing, watching TV, shows, theatre, hobbies, etc.

Though, not all the playful activities determine learning abilities, it can be resumed that most of them are determining the assimilation of proper information. But, sometimes the information determines negative conduct as a result of play, such as war games, extreme competition, etc.

Play as catharsis

This idea presents the play as an opportunity to release negative emotions, stress, pressure, avoiding to build up inside and explode later in a harmful way. Sports that imply contact like boxing, wrestling are typical examples, but we can also include other activities like football, tennis that have the same effect. Unfortunately the theory has a downside, because in losing a competition, the play can increase stress or pressure and inhibit the person instead of releasing it.

Play as an expression of self

According to this theory play is considered to be motivated by the needs and wants of the self expression. The expression of self embodies a series of characteristics like [Torkildsen, 2005] *anatomical structure, psychological structure, state of mind, the physical environment, the social environment, habits, the needs and desires*.

The physical characteristics of a person influence him to elect a proper play, for example a tall person prefers playing basketball, rather than a short one. The state of mind determines the moods of a person and therefore the type of activity selected – individual, collective, adventurous, melancholic, etc. The psychological types play an important role in selecting a leisure activity to play. The physical environment affects leisure behavior referring to whether conditions, location, altitude, relief, etc. The social environment explained by attitudes and behavior of the family, friends, colleges, etc. exerts more influences than the previous one, sometimes in the detriments of personal needs and wants. The leisure habits remain usually the same if practices for a long period of time. The needs and wants are the general determinants of leisure activities, regardless of the amount of them or the importance they have.

According to the physiological need, specialists have identified a series of correspondent leisure activities, as presented in the table below:

Table1. Psychological categorization of leisure activities

Psychological needs	Leisure activities
1. Tension release	1. Creative activities such as craft, sculpture, etc.
2. Creating feeling of security	2. Collective activities such as coins, stamps, etc.
3. Mental stimulation	3. Knowledge and skill acquisition such as reading travel, etc.
4. Release of aggressive impulses	4. Competitive games such as football, wrestling, etc.
5. Eliminating feelings of inferiority and superiority	5. Noncompetitive sports and games such as dance, skiing, etc
6. Emotional involvement	6. Spectator activities such as movies, theatre, etc
7. Social involvement	7. Group participation activities such as volunteer work, etc.

Source: Leitner M., Leitner S., *Leisure enhancement*, Haworth Press Inc, New York, 2004

Play as relaxation

The relaxation theory proposed that the play activities are caused directly by the need to find compensation outlets to allow relaxation and restore after stressful work.

Play as generalization or compensation

These concept regard the belief that people choice of play are based on the nature of their work. According to the first, people tend to behave in leisure the same as at work, transferring their work skills to leisure and the second suggest that people tend to compensate for the negative or unfulfilling part of their work, or to recreate needs not meet at work.

Play as competence –effectance

This theory studies the effect of situational and environmental stimuli on the motivation to engage in leisure activities. The basic motivation for play represents the desire to manipulate the environment and produce the desire effect, by analyzing the feedback obtained. This only applies for sports an seldom, or never to the spectator leisure such as spectacle, movies, etc.

Play as an escape from reality

Escaping from reality usually covers a large area of leisure activities depending on the person in cause. The main characteristic of persons and the general environment influences greatly the choice in leisure and play, for example a teenager escapes from stress, reality by consuming alcohol, but an adult feels escaping from reality by taking a trip.

Play as optimal arousal

The theory explains the leisure behavior by attaining an optimal level of arousal, and by arousal meaning both the psychical and psychological stimulation. Every person reacts different and has an optimal arousal that can be lower or higher for others. Finding the optimal one would determine a repetition of that leisure activity that determined his satisfaction and entertainment.

These theories show different types of leisure activities influenced by different components of the play. As it has been underlined before, each theory focuses on a segment, a part of leisure services needed or desired by the consumers. The question here presents itself as the necessity to understand what is the implication of play behavior in leisure services. The answer not only determines why people play but, more important how people' behavior influences the leisure services and therefore the whole industry.

3. The influence and implication of play in leisure services

The play behavior brings out an important segment for study for all companies and organizations in the leisure industry. Offering a large base for behavior analyze, the play unfortunate has been overlooked over the years, excepting the children area of play.

The leisure services are developing in a higher rate that influenced in a higher measure the choice of the final consumer. The large number of leisure opportunities has increased the election criteria and therefore the consumers' perspective.

The awareness of its importance should arise in all leisure activities as the leisure services have become the key of market competitiveness. More so, if play enriches people's life in physically, intellectually and spiritually then it must be a permanent part of it determining a well being for individual and society. As a result, the leisure specialists should create proper opportunities for influencing factors of play and diminish those that are against it. These ideas raise the question of putting it into practice. Regardless of the specialists point of view, the main issues remains finding the method to transform the ideas into programs, initiatives, results.

For using the play characteristics in determining the leisure segments of consumers, there must be taken into account the duality of the play. The concept of duality explains intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions with important implication for leisure, presented in a model (Callois) that contains the relationship between them, realized on four steps.

Table2. The duality of play

Play			
Extrinsic outcomes(obligation)		Intrinsic motivation(free)	level
→	Stimuli seeking behavior	←	
Learning behavior		Leisure behavior	1
Utilitarian		Non utilitarian	
Intentional	Developmental	Indirect	2
	Educational		
Unintentional	Socialization	Direct	3
	Compensation		
	Sublimation		
Economic		Uneconomic	
Work like form	Games with rules	Recreational form	4

Source: Lashley C., Lee-Ross D., *Organization behavior for leisure services*, Batterworth.Heinemann, 2003;

At the first level, the motivation for play is presented as an intrinsic quality that changes from children to adults. For children the stimuli seeking behavior determines no differences in play or other activities, extending the area gradually and therefore making the difference between working/learning activities and fun activities.

The second level takes into consideration the fact that games or game like activities, under the influence of education/development theories determines the lack of playfulness by searching the results as the main objective, been more inclined for the extrinsic part.

The third level is rather based on the intrinsic, as it acknowledges the importance of the apparently free chosen nature of play activities, as far as the participants are concerned, which are performing social functions.

The four level presents play as a direct connection between intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, the games with rules theories been able to compress the meaning of a game a profession, or as fun in the same context.

The relation of play to leisure can be explained as: *the increased level of freedom of choosing activities determines an increased potential of leisure, the increase in extrinsic orientation influences the decrease of leisure potential, the increase in play as learning device determines a decrease of leisure potential, the increases in structured play determines a decrease of leisure potential*

In conclusion, playing represents an important activity in the general development of mankind. Analyzing the animal regnum we can definitely noticed the importance of play activities regarding all aspect of their life. Similarly to them, people engage in playful situation that can influence their work skills, their learning abilities, their capacities and abilities, their behavior and attitude. The relation play and leisure has grown significantly due to the increasing needs and wants for leisure and therefore the necessity to learn the future of leisure behavior.

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